

City of Arts & Innovation

City Council Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL **DATE: OCTOBER 21, 2025**

FROM: COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT **WARDS: ALL**

SUBJECT: PUBLIC HEARING - FISCAL YEAR 2025/26 MASTER FEES AND CHARGES; RESOLUTION AMENDING THE CITY'S FEES AND CHARGES SCHEDULE TO ADD THREE BUILDING PLAN CHECK SELF CERTIFICATION FEES; AND ADOPT AN ORDINANCE FOR THE BUILDING PLAN CHECK SELF-CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

ISSUE:

Hold public hearing for the proposed fees and charges; adopt a Resolution amending the City's Master Fee Schedule adding three Building Plan Check Self Certification Fees, Adopt an Ordinance amending Title 16 of the Riverside Municipal Code by adding sections 16.04.430, 16.06.050, 16.08.100, and 16.14.030 regarding the Plan Check Self-Certification Program

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the City Council:

1. Conduct a public hearing to amend the City of Riverside's Fiscal Year 2025/26 Master Fees and Charges Schedule for the addition of three (3) Building Plan Check Self-Certification Fees;
2. Adopt a resolution amending the City's Fees and Charges Schedule to add three (3) Building Plan Check Self-Certification fees: (1) Design Professional Program Application Fee, (2) Design Professional Program Renewal Fee; and (3) Project Application Fee
3. Adopt an Ordinance amending Title 16 of the Riverside Municipal Code by adding sections 16.04.430, 16.06.050, 16.08.100, and 16.14.030 regarding the Plan Check Self-Certification Program

INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCE:

On September 16, 2025, the City Council introduced an ordinance amending Title 16 of the Riverside Municipal Code by adding sections 16.0.430, 16.06.050, 06.08.100, 16.14.030 regarding the Plan Check Self-Certification Program. The motion carried unanimously with Councilmember

Robillard absent.

BACKGROUND

The Building Plan Check Self-Certification Pilot Program presents a unique opportunity to enhance the City's building permit process with the organization's broader economic development strategy, the goals of the Streamline Riverside Initiative, and our emergency preparedness and response effort.

Under the Self-Certification Pilot Program, licensed architects and engineers registered in the State of California may certify that building plans they prepare comply with adopted building codes and standards. This allows applicants to bypass the City's technical review process, significantly reducing the time between application submittal and permit issuance to an estimated 1 to 3 business days. Building owners and qualified design Professionals retain flexibility by choosing to either self-certify eligible projects or proceed through the standard plan review process.

Self-certification draws on the professional responsibility of licensed design professionals (i.e., architects and engineers) to ensure that submitted plans meet all applicable building code requirements. Nationally, this approach has shown measurable success in improving permit turnaround times, enhancing customer experience, and supporting local economic growth while upholding building code compliance. However, implementation in California requires a more tailored approach due to the State's rigorous building standards under Title 24, as well as local mandates such as the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and historic preservation, which often require discretionary approvals.

For Riverside, the Program will provide an expedited permitting option enabling the Building & Safety Division and One Stop Shop to allocate resources more effectively. Qualified design professionals will assume responsibility for plan compliance, reducing the City's permitting backlogs and improving turnaround times for applicants, while maintaining public safety through robust inspections and audits. This model improves the City's permitting efficiency, ensures compliance with adopted codes, and enhances overall service delivery.

Currently, standard plan check timelines range from 10 to 25 business days for initial reviews and 5 to 10 business days for rechecks, which can contribute to permitting delays while limiting the number of permits that can be processed. Expediting the permit approval process through self-certification offers a powerful opportunity to accelerate project delivery, improve throughput, and better position Riverside as a forward thinking, business-friendly community. By eliminating technical plan review for eligible projects, the Program addresses a critical goal of the Streamline Riverside Initiative creating a more efficient, predictable, and customer-focused development experience. Moreover, it will allow Building & Safety staff to dedicate more resources to high-priority projects, further enhancing service levels across the department.

This program was first introduced and presented to the Economic Development Committee on July 17, 2025, which unanimously approved of staff's recommendations to proceed with draft ordinances adopting the program and related supporting documents to City Council for consideration.

On September 16, 2025, an ordinance entitled, "An Ordinance of the City of Riverside, California, Amending Title 16 of the Riverside Municipal Code by adding sections 16.0.430, 16.06.050, 06.08.100, 16.14.030 regarding the Plan Check Self-Certification Program," and a resolution entitled, "A Resolution adopting the Building Plan Check Self-Certification Pilot Program Guidelines," was presented and introduced to City Council. During discussion, Councilmember Perry noted a procedural discrepancy with the staff report being on the discussion calendar instead

of a public hearing. The Interim City Attorney clarified that while the Council could adopt the program guidelines, a subsequent public hearing would be required to amend the master fee schedule. It was moved by Councilmember Perry and seconded by Councilmember Cervantes to introduce and subsequently adopt an ordinance establishing a Building Plan Check Self-Certification Program and Guidelines, and to return at a later meeting to conduct a public hearing amending the City's Fees and Charges schedule to add three (3) Building Plan Check Self-Certification fees.

DISCUSSION

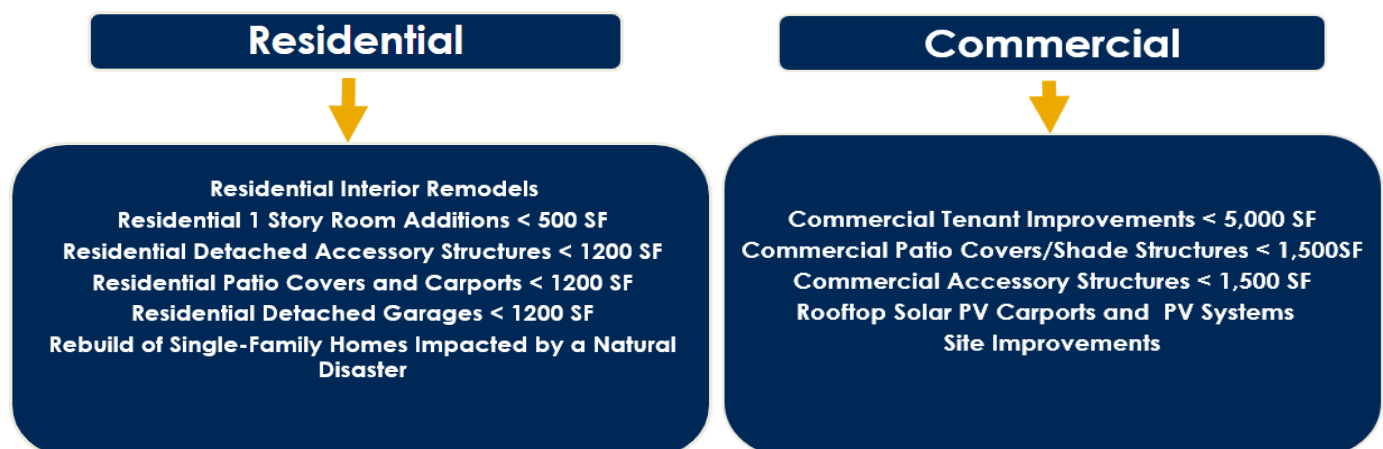
The City's Building & Safety Division has experience operating successful self-certification projects, such as residential solar photovoltaic systems and various re-roof projects. This program will expand efforts to provide an expedited path for more eligible project types to obtain building permits. The adopted Program Guidelines will act as a resource for customers.

Eligible Project Types

Utilizing a phased implementation approach, the Program will initially include various residential and commercial projects that would typically require review by the Building & Safety, Planning, and Fire Prevention Divisions.

Project types that require historic preservation, entitlement, or environmental reviews are excluded from the Program. Additionally, projects within high fire or very high fire severity zones, uses deemed to be hazardous, changes of use within existing buildings, and most newly constructed buildings are also excluded at this time. A measured approach to implementation will ensure that self-certification will be applied to projects that can be streamlined while maintaining minimum health and safety standards. Limiting self-certification to specific project types is a strategic and responsible approach that balances efficiency with public safety and is adaptable based on Program performance, data collection, and evolving best practices.

Eligible residential and commercial projects include:



The Program may also be utilized in times of need for emergency response purposes to facilitate the rebuilding effort and permitting needs of the community. The City's more recent Hawarden incident in 2024 is an example of an emergency response effort that could greatly benefit from the self-certification process.

Program Application and Acceptance

To be eligible for participation and acceptance in the Program, the licensed design professional must meet the following criteria:

1. Be registered in the State of California and in good standing with a minimum of five years of experience in responsible charge of building design;
2. Expertise in the specific residential or commercial project type;
3. Demonstrated technical ability in code compliance through certification or other approved means; and
4. Maintain professional liability and errors and omissions insurance coverage as determined by the City's Risk Manager.

Licensed Design Professionals (LDP) who meet minimum qualifications and are approved by the Building Official may participate in the Program and begin submitting plans for eligible projects. By allowing these professionals to assume full responsibility for the code compliance of their plans, the Program will eliminate the need for a traditional plan check, significantly reducing the permit issuance timeline to an estimated 1 to 3 business days once a completed package has been accepted and approved. A list of approved design professionals will be maintained by the Building & Safety Division for public use at the permit counter and on the Divisions webpage.

Pre-Screening Process

Projects submitted under the Program must meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the Program. During the pre-screening process, the Building Official or designee will verify whether the proposed project qualifies for the Program and determine if additional approvals from other City departments or outside agencies such as Planning, Fire, Public Works, Public Utilities, or the County Environmental Health Department are required. Any such approval must be obtained prior to permit issuance. These requirements will be identified during the pre-screening process and communicated to the applicant in writing.

Application and Plan Submission

The licensed design professional must submit a complete project package that includes:

1. Self-Certification Permit Application;
2. Professional Record Statement;
3. Owner/Tenant Statement;
4. City Indemnification Letter; and
5. Complete construction plans and supplemental design documents.

The cover sheet must include a certification notice and statement attesting to code compliance.

Staff Completeness Check

Staff will perform an initial review upon submission to confirm that the project is eligible for self-certification based on the prescreening clearance, that all required forms and pre-approvals have been submitted, and that the plans are signed, complete, and contain the appropriate self-certification language. If issues are identified during this review, the Self-Certified Professional will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit the package prior to acceptance. It is important to note that this review is administrative, not a technical plan check, but a verification to ensure compliance with the Program's submittal requirements.

Plan Approval and Permit Issuance Preparation

Once the submittal package passes the completeness check, the plans are approved as a Self-Certified project and moves into the "Plan Prep" process. Staff will prepare final fees, conditions of

approval, and stamp the plans approved within three business days and notify the applicant of any other outstanding requirements.

Permit Issuance

Upon receipt of all required disclosure documents and payment of fees, the City can issue the building permit to the owner-builder or licensed contractor. Note that while the technical plan review is bypassed, all prerequisite field inspections remain mandatory, and the project may be subject to a random audit. Deviations from approved plans must be revised and resubmitted. If code violations are found, it is the responsibility of the design professional to ensure all violations are promptly addressed and corrected prior to any inspection approvals.

Audit Process

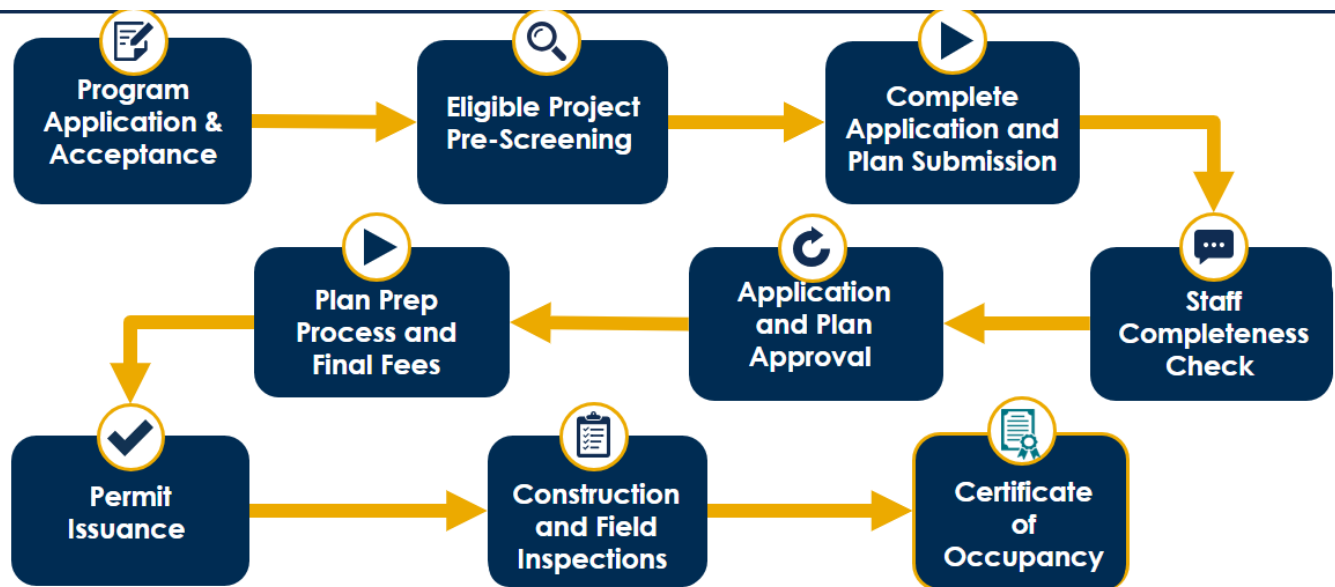
Self-Certification Programs include random audits of projects to ensure that approved designers follow policies and procedures, apply appropriate quality control, and help ensure compliance with the City's adopted codes and standards. The audit process and policy are established by the Building Official and may occur before or after permit issuance. At least 10% of submitted projects may undergo the random audit process.

In addition to random audits, audits may occur when:

1. The project field inspector finds that the plans permitted under the Self-Certification permit program are not in compliance with the code.
2. In any given month, a Self-Certified Professional has had four or more projects accepted for Self-Certification by the department and none of those projects has been audited by the department.
3. Within the preceding 12 months, no project submitted by a Self-Certified Professional has been audited by the Division.
4. A Self-Certified Professional has failed any audit within three years.

If building code violations are identified during the audit, the owner and permit-applicant will be notified in writing. The notification will direct the Self-Certified Professional to address all code violations found in the audit. A standard plan review process may commence or if the permit has been issued, inspections may be suspended until the corrected plan is made available at the construction site.

The following roadmap depicts the entire self-certification process:



Program Considerations

The Program supports the City's broader goals of modernizing permit processes, enhancing service delivery, and fostering economic development and customer service excellence. The Program will expedite permit issuance for eligible projects, helping businesses and property owners move projects forward quickly while improving overall customer satisfaction. In parallel, it will allow staff to focus more resources on complex, large-scale or special project reviews, supporting public safety, organizational priorities and enhancing operational efficiency.

Staff also recognize that consistent Program execution and quality assurance are essential to long-term success. The Program incorporates multiple safeguards including project eligibility criteria, mandatory indemnification and insurance requirements, field inspections, and a formal auditing process to ensure that public safety remains protected and professional accountability is maintained. Staff will monitor program performance, track audit outcomes, and conduct stakeholder outreach to support effective implementation.

To implement the Program, additional staff training and resources are required. The Building Official shall designate a Program lead within the Building & Safety Divisions Plan Check Unit to assist with administration and oversight of the Program. Software upgrades to the City's permit tracking software solution will also be necessary.

When analyzing the proposed implementation of the Program, it's important to evaluate potential advantages and challenges. The following table outlines some of the key pros and cons associated with self-certification:

Pros	Cons
Rapid permit issuance: Permits issued within 3 business days.	Lack of technical plan review can result in increased chances of code violations and unsafe buildings.
Promotes a business-friendly and efficient service, attracting businesses and developers who depend on a timely permit process.	Higher potential for increased costs and delays: Code violations can result in significant time and financial setbacks.

Expedites business openings and residential improvements that have a direct positive impact on the economy.	The impact of self-certified projects on professional liability insurance coverage and premiums remains uncertain.
Can reduce project schedule, loan duration, plan check fees, resulting in financial savings for applicants.	Shifts additional workload to inspectors, this increases the need for training and can prolong inspection times.
Responsibility and liability are directly placed on the Licensed Design Professional and property owner.	Additional resources to oversee and maintain the Program, including the development of new processes and procedures, audits, staff training, software updates, etc.
Ability to allocate staff resources more effectively and support critical projects, programs and initiatives.	Potential for reduced revenue during plan check process.

Fees and Cost Recovery

Cost recovery and the potential financial impacts of the Self-Certification Program require careful consideration to ensure the Program remains sustainable while complying with applicable state law. Under state requirements, the City may only charge fees that reflect the actual time and resources spent to provide the associated services. As part of program implementation, reduced plan check fees may be necessary, which could impact projected revenue. These fees include plan check fees, program registration and maintenance fees, and inspection fees.

City staff conducted a thorough analysis of the projected labor hours, operational support, and review functions necessary to implement and maintain the Program. This analysis was done in coordination with the Finance Department to ensure that all proposed fees are legally justifiable and based on actual service costs. Each proposed fee amount reflects a cost-of-service calculation model, including the following components:

- Staff time for reviewing and processing design professional applications
- Time spent verifying licensure, insurance, and professional standing
- Oversight of program compliance and maintenance of participant records
- Time allocated to conduct site inspections and verify general compliance
- System administration and documentation tracking associated with ongoing program maintenance

Recommended Program Fees	
DESIGN PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM APPLICATION FEE	\$2,500.00
DESIGN PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM RENEWAL FEE	\$300.00
PROJECT APPLICATION FEE	\$700.00

These fees are intended to offset program expenses, support cost recovery, and ensure sufficient

resources are available for program administration, compliance oversight, and customer service. To formally establish the Self-Certification Program, a resolution and ordinance is required that will define the legal framework and procedures within the City's Municipal Code. The Ordinance will authorize the Building Official to administer the Program, establish eligibility and participation requirements and provide clear enforcement mechanisms.

FISCAL IMPACT

The fiscal impact of the Building Plan Check Self-Certification Pilot Program is cost neutral. Program expenses associated with administering and operating the program will be fully offset through the collection of program fees, ensuring additional funding will not be required from the City.

The estimated cost to administer the Pilot Program will be approximately \$2,500 per new Design Professional Program applicant, \$300 per applicant renewal, and \$700 per project submission. These costs reflect staff time for reviewing applications and project submittals, as well as expenses for maintaining and growing the program.

Prepared by:	Oscar Mancillas, Building Official
Approved by:	Jennifer A. Lilley, Community & Economic Development Director
Certified as to availability of funds:	Kristie Thomas, Finance Director/Assistant Chief Financial Officer
Approved by:	Mike Futrell, City Manager
Approved as to form:	Rebecca McKee-Reimbold, Interim City Attorney

Attachments:

1. Resolution Amending Master Fee Schedule
2. Ordinance
3. Notice
4. Presentation